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New state report documents child abuse investigation problems

LANSING (AP) — Case workers in Michigan failed to investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect thoroughly or within mandated time frames in 68 of 111 cases reviewed by the state's Office of Children's Ombudsman, according to a new report.

The agency presented its 2004-05 report Tuesday to the House Family and Children's Services Committee. It found 37 instances in which workers submitted incomplete, untimely, inaccurate or insufficient documentation and 12 incidents in which children in foster care were separated from their siblings or moved for inappropriate reasons.

The report also found nine instances in which foster children did not receive needed services, six examples of insufficient supervisory oversight of case workers and four instances of workers assessing the safety of only one child in a home where more than one child lived.

The office received 782 complaints regarding nearly 1,400 children during 2004-2005 and deemed 111 of them valid for review, The Detroit News reported.

"We have laws and policies that are there," said Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin. "We need to comply with those laws and policies."

The report makes several recommendations for the Department of Human Services, including finding ways to conduct more thorough investigations, especially when infants are born to parents who have lost their rights to other children due to abuse or neglect.

In September, Republicans introduced legislation to revamp the state's oversight system and increase the number of investigations by requiring law enforcement to notify the state of domestic violence incidents in homes in which children are present. The proposals followed a series of hearings by the House Special Committee on Child Protection, which began investigating the child welfare system after the deaths of 7-year-old Ricky Holland of Williamston and other children.



Mother sentenced for abuse

By [Daniel Pepper](#)
Staff Writer

Wednesday, December 6, 2006 9:45 AM EST

The last defendant related to what police called one of the worst cases of child sexual abuse in west Michigan was sentenced Friday, Dec. 1, in Allegan County Circuit Court.

Melissa Maria Rupert, 27, of Clyde Township was the last person charged in the case. Rupert pleaded guilty to second-degree child abuse, a four-year felony, in October.

Judge George R. Corsiglia sentenced Rupert to eight months in the Allegan County Jail and five years on probation.

"A parent has an affirmative duty to protect a child against sexual molestation," Corsiglia said. "She failed in that duty. I've ruled this way before and I've been upheld all the way up to the federal courts."

At her plea hearing in October, Rupert admitted that her daughter had told her she'd been molested, but said she didn't believe the child.

Her husband, James Lee Rupert, 27, was sentenced on charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, in September. His father, Ronald, 56, was sentenced to up to 50 years in prison in July. The eight children involved come from two families that lived together in the house.

At his sentencing hearing in September, James Rupert admitted to molesting other children living in the house, but claimed he didn't molest his own children.

The case involved, according to prosecutors, tens of thousands of pictures of children being molested and being forced to touch each other sexually.

At the sentencing, Rupert's attorney, Frederick W. Jensen, Jr., argued that his client shouldn't have to register as a sex offender because although she hadn't protected her children, she had not been accused of molesting anyone herself.

"She never did anything of a sexual nature, however," Jensen said. "That's who this act is going after."

Corsiglia ruled against him.

Assistant Allegan County prosecutor Roberts Kengis said the court had discretion.

"The state laws gives the court the power to label things as sexual crimes," Kengis said.

Corsiglia ruled Rupert would have to register.

Kengis argued for a longer sentence, noting that seven children were involved in the abuse, which mostly took place at the home Rupert lived in, along with 80,000 pieces of child pornography.

"That the defendant didn't do something, or tell someone, totally misses my understanding of what it is to be a parent, or even a human being," he said.

Rupert spoke briefly before the sentence.

"I'm just sorry, that's all I can say," she said.

In a plea agreement in the case, Rupert had four counts of being an accessory after the fact to criminal sexual conduct and three other counts of second-degree child abuse dropped in exchange for her guilty plea. She also gave up her parental rights to her children.

As part of her probation she can have no contact with anyone under 17 and must not live within 1,000 feet of schools and parks. She is not allowed to own a computer or any device capable of connecting to the Internet.

She was ordered to pay a \$1,200 supervision fee and \$1,200 in court costs.

She received 45 days credit on her jail sentence for time already served.

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THE DAILY Reporter

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Medical expert takes stand in abuse trial

[Print Page](#)

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — On Wednesday, defense medical expert Dr. Pinhus Geva told the jury in the child abuse trial of Brandalyn Wertz-Hale, 24, that there is “no scientific method to show child abuse” from the dehydration of her two step-children.

Geva said “it is just an opinion” on how Wertz-Hale’s two stepchildren got to extremely high levels of sodium in their blood before they were taken to Community Health Center in Coldwater Emergency Room on June 6, 2003.

Geva, chairman of the pediatrics department at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, said he had never before seen a sodium level of 175, the level registered by the then 2-year old girl. The highest level he saw before was a 170, the same registered by the then 4-year boy.

The testimony countered that of prosecution expert Bronson Hospital pediatrician Dr. Robert Beck on Tuesday. Beck called the case “child abuse.”

Beck testified “Forced water depravation — intentional” is the only way for Jonathan Hale’s two children to end up in “critical” condition with extreme dehydration they suffered when they arrived at Bronson Medical Center in Kalamazoo.

Geva said only a camera in the home could show whether the parents gave the children salt or deprived them of water from May 30 until they were hospitalized. Geva said it is impossible to know the sodium level of the children when they arrived for visitation with Jonathan Hale and Brandalyn Wertz-Hale.

The doctors said the evidence could only exclude the sodium levels increasing over a short time. A quick increase would cause a serious reaction and coma. Geva said because the children acted normal — they were “walking and talking” — before they came to the ER, he could say the build up of sodium was gradual. Geva said the build up could occur over several days or even months to reach that high level.

Geva said the other doctors and authorities “made up their mind (about the abuse) before they got there(with scientific evidence). They just closed their vision” the Israeli-born doctor said from the witness stand.

“The American diet is rich in salt and could build up gradually,” he added.

Geva said it was the “work of imagination” to see the end result, the lab test, and make the assumption of intentional abuse “there is no medical proof to prove it.”

He admitted they were in great risk if nothing was to lower sodium. The Sparrow doctor said the emergency room in Coldwater may have tipped the girl’s system when they gave the wrong fluids: Hi-C and chocolate milk.

Neither of the children asked for water until they arrived at the hospital, according to testimony. Geva could not explain why since he stated they “had to be thirsty” with the high sodium level.

Geva emphasized there are no studies on how long it would take to raise sodium level to the 170 levels.

"Even one study would not be valid since dehydration occurs differently in different environments," he said.

Looking at pictures of the children taken at the hospitals the day they were taken in, it was his opinion neither looked sick. He did indicate the girl had sunken eyes. As to levels of hydration and sodium, each child is different, because of activity and the different physical makeups. Illness will add to the need for fluid.

Wertz-Hale told several people she had given the children water and pedialyte, a hydration drink, during the week. Geva said, as a parent himself, you cannot tell how much children really do drink.

Pedialyte is an oral electrolyte maintenance solution, specially formulated for children with diarrhea and vomiting. Doctors recommended it to Wertz-Hale for her other daughter who had been ill when the stepchildren arrived.

Under cross examination by Assistant Prosecutor Terri Norris, Geva said you can't make assumptions about what a persons reactions will be at any sodium level, since each person is individual and reacts differently, you can't go by averages or "normals."

Geva said he told Prosecutor Kirk Kashian he had reported parents for child abuse but none for hypernatraemia or dehydration.

Geva said the history of the children was very important. All the doctors who treated the children and testified admitted they did not talk to Jonathan Hale or Brandalyn Wertz-Hale for a medical history of the week at their Quincy home.

The seven women and five men on the jury saw a defensive Brandalyn Wertz-Hale on video June 19, 2003, just after she was arrested for child abuse.

MSP Sargent James Karbon questioned her in the post interview room. She admitted she and Jonathan Hale were the only people who cared for the children during the Memorial Day visitation. Told of the charge Brandalyn asked "on what proof, what kind?" Karbon answered "for the condition the children were in."

Wertz-Hale told the officer the only difference between what her two children and the stepchildren received was "pedialyte." she said she didn't know how they became dehydrated. "They had sippy cups and I allow them to drink all they wanted to drink."

Wertz-Hale said she didn't use salt for herself or children and police only found empty salt shakers in the house.

She said both children were drinking lots of water. All punishments consisted of "timeouts."

When Wertz-Hale was told her bond was \$100,000, she questioned the amount. Then she told Karbon she didn't want to talk any more without a lawyer.

A friend from the Today Church in Quincy and her 14-year-old daughter testified for the defense. Both said they saw the parents and all four children from Friday until Sunday night at a yard sale and services. Loretta Marshall said all four young children — Wertz-Hale's 1- and 2-year-old, plus the stepchildren — appeared normal. Wertz-Hale's daughter was ill but the other children appeared normal.

"I report child abuse when I see it," she told Prosecutor Kirk Kashian when questioned.

The woman misidentified the little girl as the 4-year-old boy. The girl's hair was cut to one-inch late in the week.

Her teen daughter had stayed with the Hales Friday and Saturday night and saw nothing out of the normal.

Marshall said she lost track of the family when the Hales did not come back to church after charges were filed.

A Success By Six worker testified she saw the family on the day before the children were hospitalized and nothing seemed out of the normal. She was there to help with Wertz-Hale's oldest child.

A neighbor, Theresa Letterbeck, who lived next door for four months, testified she helped cut the 2-year-old girl's hair because it was shorter on one side and the girl wanted it cut. Letterbeck, a school bus driver, said Wertz-Hale came over upset because the 4-year-old boy had sat down in the middle of U.S. 12 in a dispute with the stepmother.

Letterbeck said Wertz-Hale was concerned because she tried to be nice to the stepchildren but they did not reciprocate. The only punishment was "time out" in a chair.

Letterbeck also said the children always were thin, pale, with dark circles under their eyes.

"I just thought that was the way they looked," she testified. "Jon was very thin so I didn't think too much of it."

Another friend, Sondra Filietz, said she was there the week of visitation. The 2-year-old girl had diarrhea and a runny nose.

All the defense witnesses said they saw the children with sippy cups. The defense is expected to finish this today and the case may go to the jury.

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21 child-pornography counts dumped in plea deal

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, December 07, 2006

By Paul Janczewski

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In a deal with the Genesee County Prosecutor's Office, a Grand Blanc Township man facing 22 counts of child pornography-related charges that could have sent him to prison for 20 years, said Tuesday he will plead guilty to one of the charges.

Robert C. Lamb, a registered sex offender, said he will plead guilty in Genesee Circuit Court to one count of possession of child sexually abusive material. That charge is punishable by 4 years in prison, but because Lamb also will admit to being a habitual offender, the sentence will be increased to six years.

In exchange for his plea, which was made in Central District Court Tuesday before Davison District Judge John L. Conover, the remaining 21 counts against Lamb will be dismissed. Nearly half of those counts were 20-year felonies.

Lamb, 50, is scheduled to appear Dec. 18 before Genesee Circuit Judge Geoffrey L. Neithercut, where he would officially enter his guilty plea to the one count.

Conover told Lamb he was "extremely fortunate" the other counts were dismissed, but he refused to lower the \$20,000 cash bond set on the one remaining count. Lamb so far has been held in the county jail on the posting of a total of \$440,000 in cash bonds, but now only the bond on the first count remains.

"We feel this is an excellent disposition of this case, considering all the factors involved," said Assistant Prosecutor Richmond M. Riggs.

He said the prosecutor's office will have further comment after Lamb's plea is accepted by the circuit court.

Lamb had been charged last month in a four-page, 22-count warrant from a case investigated by Grand Blanc Township police.

Lamb had been arrested on charges of producing child pornography in 1986. In that case, police said Lamb had sex with boys and videotaped young boys performing sex acts. One boy told police Lamb paid him about \$30 to pose naked and perform a sex act on videotape. The boy said Lamb promised the tape would be sent to New York, where it would be sold for upward of \$1,500, according to police reports.

Another boy told police a similar story, but said the film would be sold in Florida

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or California.

An assistant county prosecutor at the time said Lamb created an "almost ingenious way of coming in contact with young people" by managing baseball teams, taking pictures and approaching boys at fast-food restaurants, according to court files.

Lamb pleaded guilty in 1988 to third-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a teenager between the ages of 13 and 15. He was sentenced to a year in jail and 5 years' probation.

Then-Circuit Judge Thomas C. Yeotis sentenced him to a combination of jail and probation. When a state appeals court ruled in 1992 that the law required Yeotis to give Lamb a prison sentence, the judge sentenced him to 6 months in prison. But because Lamb already had spent 292 days in the county jail, he wouldn't have been required to serve the prison sentence.

But because of an appeal by county prosecutors, Lamb was required to serve several years in prison and was then placed on the state's sexual offender list.



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File Opening Bills Leave The Senate

MIRS, December 6, 2006

The Senate passed a bill that will allow a Friend of the Court or an authorized foster care agency to review an employee's case file when foster care recipients issue complaints against the foster care worker.

[SB 1512](#), sponsored by Sen. Bill [HARDIMAN](#) (R-Kentwood), passed unanimously in the Senate. [SB 1512](#) adds certain people and agencies to the list of those who can access confidential records from the state's central child abuse registry.

"Child abuse is a horrible crime and we need to allow access to these records in limited circumstances for the purpose of making sure everything possible is done in order to protect children," Hardiman said. "While it's important to keep these records as confidential as possible, there are times when pertinent information should be accessible in order to put a child's best interests first."

The Department asked that the bill be introduced because the Department of Human Services (DHS) used to be able to look at these files, but stopped looking at them because of legal questions surrounding the practice. This bill would solidify that the Department can legally look at these records.



Social worker wins award for exemplary efforts

Wednesday, December 6, 2006

By DREW STOREY

Charlene Nash, of Grand Rapids, was recently awarded the 2006 John P. Steketee Child Welfare Advocate of the Year award.

The award was presented at the annual Pathways to Permanence Child Welfare Training.

At age 50, Nash went back to school eventually completing her master's degree in social work in 1994. She started working for D.A. Blodgett for Children as a social work therapist in the Parent Therapist Program.

The Parent Therapist Program is unique in that, instead of following foster children as they move and grow, Nash stays with the same set of foster parents to develop effective plans for managing behaviors and crisis.

"We turn foster parents into paraprofessionals," she said.

Nash also holds by-monthly training and review meetings on "understanding poverty" and "children with attachment disorders" for foster families so they can better care for the foster children in their homes

Over the last 12 years, Nash has insisted on taking a full caseload, working with some of the most challenging children.

"I am in a situation where I can dedicate my time to this job. The job is much too consuming when you have kids at home," Nash said.

She has spent many evenings and weekends attending school events, athletic programs and event tutoring on Sundays.

Now 70, Charlene is truly respected and appreciated by her co-workers at D.A. Blodgett and by the foster families and children she serves.

"It is my goal to be the oldest social worker in Grand Rapids," Charlene said.

The 2006 John P. Steketee Child Welfare Advocate of the Year award was presented to Charlene by Judge G. Patrick Hillary, the presiding judge of Kent County Circuit Court Family Division honoring her commitment to children and families.

"I was very aware of how honored I was. First I was dumbfounded. In the office it became a lark. They gave me a crown at my office. But it's impressive to see your name on the plaque. It was a very emotional, very rewarding day," said Nash.

As far as retirement is concerned, not even Nash knows when that day will come.

"I thought I would stop in my 60s, then maybe at 70. Now I'm thinking 74," said Nash. "I really enjoy my life."

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12/07/2006

St. John students fill holiday bags for children in foster care

By: Jan Rynearson , Features Editor



St. John School of Fenton students in second through sixth grade made and filled 286 holiday bags for the children in foster care through Ennis Center for Children in Flint.

Ennis volunteers picked the bags up on Friday and will present them to children at Ennis-sponsored parties in Flint, Waterford and Detroit.

This is the sixth year St. John School has participated in the program sewing and filling the bags.

Gingerbread people, bears, snowmen and Christmas stockings decorated the outside of the bags which were filled with age-appropriate items including socks, hats, mittens, crayons, coloring books, candy, cards, diaries, toys, small cars and stuffed animals.

The children and their teachers found this year's project rewarding and a positive experience.

A blue and yellow advertisement for Vic Canever Chevrolet. It features the name 'Vic Canever' in large blue letters, the Chevrolet logo, and the phone number '1-800-926-3350' in large green letters. To the right, it says 'The Chevy store with' in yellow and 'MORE' in large, stylized green letters.

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Published December 7, 2006

Shelter celebrates 10 years

SIREN/Eaton marks success with open house

By Hannah Northey
Lansing State Journal

CHARLOTTE - When Ronda Brininstool was pregnant and homeless in 2001, she found help at the SIREN/Eaton Shelter, where the finances were as tenuous as her life.

Back then, the 33-year-old Onondaga woman, her unemployed husband, and two small children received food, medicine, and a place to stay.

Volunteers offered counseling and support when Brininstool's baby died from complications shortly after she arrived. They helped her again months later when her husband committed suicide and she once again turned to the shelter.

"I just knew I had support - you're really safe here," Brininstool said. "I would have been living from hotel to hotel if I hadn't come here."

Today, she is employed full time at Peckham, Inc., and her two oldest children are on the honor roll. She gathered with others at the shelter Wednesday to celebrate its 10th anniversary of helping the needy.

"These people gave me strength," Brininstool said.

But the shelter wasn't always running strong.

Ten years ago, the Eaton shelter was in danger of closing because of funding cuts, and SIREN, a fledgling program for domestic violence victims at that time, could not raise enough funds to open a safe house for battered women.

SIREN stands for Social Injustice Relief Effective Now.



(Photo by ROD SANFOR/Lansing State Journal)
Quite a collection: Janet Wilcox (left) and Holly Adams look at musical teddy bears Wednesday in Charlotte during an open house for the 10th anniversary of the merger of SIREN Inc. and the Eaton Shelter into the SIREN/Eaton Shelter. Both women work for the shelter.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 4,398 people sought housing services from April 12, 2004 to June 2006.

For more information

- Contact the SIREN/Eaton Shelter at: P.O. Box 369 245 S. Cochran Ave. Charlotte, MI 48813, or call at 543-0748.
- The shelter is presently asking for cleaning supplies, diapers, phone and gas cards, and bedding. To see the complete wish list or to find out more about the shelter, visit www.sireneatonshelter.org.

"We were both struggling," said Nancy Oliver, director of SIREN/Eaton Shelter.

The two organizations combined efforts and now serve both domestic violence victims and homeless families under the umbrella of one organization.

Now the shelter consists of an on-site food bank, 11 transitional housing units, eight emergency shelter units and two group homes for domestic violence survivors and their children.

Volunteers have seen an average increase of 48 families a year over the last decade.

Cindy Filko an executive assistant at the shelter, said the units are always full, as is the waiting list.

"You get people coming off the streets, living in their cars," said Cindy Filko, an executive assistant at the shelter. "You have nowhere to put them."

Oliver attributes the growing demand to rising unemployment rates and housing prices.

"Our unemployment rate is the most significant factor and the cost of housing has gone up," Oliver said.

"A person making \$7 an hour is hard-pressed to be able to pay their rent, pay their car, feed their children and pay bills."

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 06, 2006

States expand Food Stamp programs

By Christine Vestal, Stateline.org Staff Writer

In the war on hunger, a handful of states have made big strides in getting federally funded Food Stamps to more poor families, while others have lagged behind.

Only 60 percent of eligible Americans received Food Stamps nationwide in 2004, but Missouri, Tennessee and Oregon helped buy groceries for more than 80 percent of those with incomes low enough to qualify, according to a new study.

Three other states -- California, Wyoming and Massachusetts -- came in last, providing Food Stamps to fewer than 50 percent of their poor citizens, according to the [study](#) released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) last month.

Food Stamps, an unlimited entitlement program funded by USDA and administered by states, fed some 26 million low-income people this year at a cost of \$31 billion, nearly double the federal expenditure on welfare cash assistance programs.

The federally-funded program is the states' primary weapon against hunger, and for those that make it easier for low-income people to apply there is more money.

Tennessee -- which has a growing number of people in poverty -- retooled its Food Stamps program in 2002 when Congress loosened rules states must follow in determining eligibility.

With a few simplifications to its application process, expanded hours of operation at its welfare offices and an improved outreach program, the Volunteer state boosted Food Stamp participation by more than 20 percent in the last three years.

In addition, Tennessee became the first state to put caseworkers on the road in search of eligible people unaware of the program or unable to come into a welfare office to apply.

Over the past year, seven caseworkers in two counties visited churches, senior centers and public housing projects, signing up thousands of poor people for Food Stamps who otherwise would have missed out on the program.

This year, USDA gave Tennessee a \$1 million bonus for exceptional program improvements. Based on a preliminary calculation, the state's participation rate jumped from 83 percent in 2004 to 94 percent in 2005.

USDA determines the value of Food Stamps an individual or family can receive based on income. This year, benefits range from \$10 per month for an individual making \$26,000 per year (130 percent of the poverty level) to as much as \$400 per month for a family of three or more at lower income levels.

States must verify incomes, choosing whether to count assets such as cars, homes and savings accounts. Tennessee and Missouri do not count cars and Oregon eliminated the asset calculation altogether.

By including non-income assets, some states, such as Florida, make it more difficult for low-income seniors and others with assets to qualify.

While USDA penalizes states that make too many errors in calculating benefits, state error rates historically have been low. In the last 10 years, the federal government has encouraged states to expand their programs and Food Stamp budgets have been non-controversial since the program's inception in the mid 1960s.

But for a variety of political and historical reasons, some states make it more difficult than others for people to qualify for the program. In California, New York, Texas and Arizona, Food Stamp applicants must be fingerprinted, a strong deterrent for some applicants, particularly immigrants.

Nebraska's food stamp application runs 26 pages and many other states have similarly lengthy forms, including some that require extensive paperwork to verify incomes.

In most states, Food Stamp applicants must appear twice a year during working hours at a designated welfare office during limited hours, making it difficult for the working poor. In many cases workers choose to forgo the food assistance program rather than lose pay or risk their jobs.

Tennessee and 18 other states last year received USDA waivers allowing them to require only one in-person visit per year and a small number of states soon will be able to sign up people over the telephone and Internet.

In the 1990s, federal Food Stamp rules were tightened and states worried about potential penalties. In addition, welfare reform caused caseworkers who also administered Food Stamps to require additional verification for all welfare programs, complicating the Food Stamp application process.

As a result, Food Stamp use plummeted from a high of 27.5 million people in 1994 to 17.3 million in 2001. In response, USDA loosened qualification rules in 2002, but it was up to states to take advantage of the new flexibility.

The results of the new USDA study indicate some states are making progress expanding their Food Stamps programs, but the pace in most states is slow, welfare advocates say. They urge state leaders to cut red-tape that prevents thousands of low-income workers from taking advantage of the food program, which has little impact on state budgets. States pay about half the bill for administering Food Stamp programs, which last year cost \$2.5 billion.

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feedback to our *Letters to the editor* section at letters@stateline.org.
Contact Christine Vestal at cvestal@stateline.org.

2004 Food Stamp Participation Rates

States vary widely in their ability to get federally funded Food Stamps to those who are eligible. Nationally, some 26 million people received Food Stamps in 2004 – only 60 percent of those who meet federal income requirements.

1.Missouri	84%
2.Tennessee	83%
3.Oregon	83%
4.Maine	77%
5.West Virginia	76%
6.Louisiana	75%
7.Oklahoma	75%
8.Hawaii	72%
9.Kentucky	71%
10.Arizona	71%
11.Indiana	69%
12.Arkansas	68%
13.South Carolina	68%
14.Georgia	67%
15.Illinois	67%
16.Michigan	66%
17.Washington	65%
18.New Mexico	65%
19.Ohio	64%
20.Vermont	62%
21.Iowa	61%
22.Delaware	61%
23.Nebraska	61%

24.Mississippi	61%
25.Utah	60%
26.Virginia	59%
27.Alaska	59%
28.Montana	58%
29.Idaho	58%
30.Kansas	58%
31.Connecticut	58%
32.Texas	58%
33.Pennsylvania	57%
34.Minnesota	57%
35.Alabama	57%
36.Colorado	56%
37.North Carolina	56%
38.Florida	55%
39.Wisconsin	54%
40.New Hampshire	54%
41.Nevada	54%
42.Maryland	53%
43.South Dakota	53%
44.North Dakota	53%
45.New York	53%
46.Rhode Island	52%
47.New Jersey	50%
48.Massachusetts	49%
49.Wyoming	48%
50.California	46%

December 6, 2006

CHILD SUPPORT BILLS CLEAR HOUSE **COMMITTEE**

Several bills creating a new commission to oversee periodic reviews of the state's child support system cleared the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, marking the beginning of a late-session rush to respond to the Supreme Court's request to take the matter out of its jurisdiction.

At stake are millions of dollars in federal penalties that would kick in by October 1, 2007, and the Supreme Court has said it does not believe the judiciary is the appropriate place for such a policy-making function as establishing child support enforcement systems. Federal law requires states to demonstrate every four years how they are collecting court-ordered child support payments.

The bills ([HB 6698](#), [HB 6699](#), [HB 6700](#), [HB 6701](#), [HB 6702](#), [HB 6703](#), [HB 6704](#), and [HB 6705](#)) transfer the responsibilities from the Friend of the Court Bureau of the State Court Administrative Office to a new 18-member Child Support Formula Commission.

[Rep. Alexander Lipsey](#) (D-Kalamazoo), sponsor of the lead bill, said the package will also streamline the process and make it simpler for the parties in a support case to understand their rights. He acknowledged not all concerns have yet been addressed, calling the package "a work in progress."

The commission, with seven voting members and 11 advisory members, would adopt the child support formula already created by the Friend of the Court, periodically review the formula for support and health care to comply with federal law which would be based on the needs of the child and actual resources of each parent. The formula would include automatic annual changes.

The Friend of the Court Association opposed the package, saying the child support guidelines should continue to be maintained by the judiciary. Jeff Albaugh of the association expressed concern that the legislation could upset ongoing discussions to comply with the federal requirements by the October 1 deadline.

He also criticized the size of the commission, and the requirement for public hearings when the presence of nonvoting members representing various interests could serve that purpose.

But Carl Martina, chair of the State Bar of Michigan's Child Support Committee, said work on compliance should not be disturbed since both the Friend of the Court Association and the Supreme Court Administrative Office would be members of the new commission. "It is our view that establishment of a child support formula is not proper for the judiciary," he said.

Michigan Chronicle Online - <http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive>

Homelessness on rise in Detroit

<http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive/articles/250/1/Homelessness-on-rise-in-Detroit/Page1.html>

By Melody Moore

Melody Moore

Published on 11/29/2006

Lack of affordable housing is just one reason why homelessness exists.

The Homeless Action Network said Detroit's homeless rate has hit 14,000, an alarming number advocates say must initiate action from city hall.

The disturbing phenomena reveals many faces OF homelessness, including children.

"My pastor told me about Covenant House," said 20-year old LeVar Williams, one of many homeless youth living at Covenant House of Michigan. "So I called the van to come pick me up."

Nearly 14,000 people are homeless per night

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"My pastor told me about Covenant House," said 20-year old LeVar Williams, one of many homeless youth living at Covenant House of Michigan. "So I called the van to come pick me up."

Covenant House, located at 2959 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., runs four programs that service young adults, including rites of passage, a crisis center and two educational centers for GED trainings.

Williams said his dream was to complete high school and then enroll in a trade school.

Before he came to Covenant House, Williams lived in an abandoned house with his mother, which his oldest sister purchased and renovated into a rehabilitation facility for girls. He dropped out of high school in the ninth grade. Now he wants his GED.

"Covenant House is very important because I didn't have anywhere to go," Williams said. "Now I can get focused on my work (to get a GED)."

Homelessness continues to be a major issue in Detroit that 58-year old James VanHorn said needs to be addressed.

"I have been homeless for two years after losing my job at Ford," VanHorn said. "I worked for Ford for 14 years. After I lost my job my wife divorced me."

VanHorn, the father of ten children, four of whom are in Texas, said homeless people are treated badly in the city.

"People here treat you like a complete dog," VanHorn said. "There is no love. Even the way the police treat you is pitiful. Homeless people are discriminated against."

VanHorn said despite his financial challenges, he hopes at 62 he can start receiving Social Security benefits to change his present living conditions. He said he visits with his six children occasionally.

"When your life is not in order, you are no longer the daddy they know," VanHorn said.

He does not like living in shelters because of the stringent rules. He chooses the streets at night.

Substance abuse has been a contributing factor to the homeless rate in the city.

"I got homeless when I started using drugs, and I have been homeless for about 8 years now," said Ceasar Leneair. "After I got into drugs it became hard for me to get a job."

Leneair said he could not get a job because he owed child support payments for his 17-year old son.

"Most jobs would ask you for a police clearance and I could not go downtown to get a clearance," Leneair said. "The only thing I get now is hand bills."

He admits that he created his present condition.

"I only pray that my son does not hate me," Leneair said. "I tried to instill in him not to fault his mother because it is my fault."

Leneair is currently residing at Just Love ministry, which provides food for the homeless, run by Rev Vernon Rayford.

The number of shelters and food and clothing programs is not enough to take care of the thousands living on the streets every day.

Some say with a downturn economy, federal funding for homeless programs have taken the hit, forcing many organizations out of the business of caring for the homeless.

The Homeless Action Network said the number is still increasing and more young people are being affected.

“There are kids who are living on the street, living in abandoned houses, so we have a street outreach van that goes out into the neighborhoods and gets the kids who are living in abandoned houses,” said Sam Joseph, Covenant House president. “One very important mission is that Covenant House is a voluntary facility. When they are willing to come they are more willing to put forth the effort to make a change.”

Covenant House will host a candlelight vigil on Dec. 5 to honor the people who have died within the past year due to homelessness.

Pat Eaton, Homeless Action Network board member, said lack of affordable housing is a reason why homelessness continues to plague Detroit.

“Detroit needs affordable housing,” said Eaton, who also chairs the advocacy committee. “We have a great deal of shelters, but we need to be able to move people beyond shelters.”

According to the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness, a person is considered chronically homeless if they are homeless for more than two years and they have been repeatedly homeless.

Michigan is one of 15 states that have adopted the 10-year Plan to End Homelessness.

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thursday, December 7, 2006

Facilities, services attract homeless

The article in the Nov. 4 Gazette tries to paint a picture of Kalamazoo not taking care of its homeless people. This is far from the truth.

I admit, we have a homelessness problem in Kalamazoo, but many of these homeless people are in Kalamazoo because we have such good facilities. People have come and are continuing to come from all over the country because we have some of the best facilities for taking care of the homeless.

Kalamazoo is currently burdened with the homelessness problem, not because of its lack of acknowledging the problem, but because we are trying to take care of everyone else's problem. If you build it, they will come. And that they have. Please, don't try to tell us that all these homeless originate in Kalamazoo.

Jeff Weisman

Kalamazoo

Michigan Chronicle Online - <http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive>

Nearly 8,000 people attend employment expo

<http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive/articles/245/1/Nearly-8000-people-attend-employment-expo/Page1.html>

By CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS

Published on 11/29/2006

The Southeast Michigan Employment Training and Family Resource Expo attracted in excess of 7,800 people to the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

The Oct. 11 expo matched job seekers with 108 employers who offered more than 6,100 jobs.

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The Southeast Michigan Employment Training and Family Resource Expo attracted in excess of 7,800 people to the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

The Oct. 11 expo matched job seekers with 108 employers who offered more than 6,100 jobs.

According to a community survey conducted earlier this year by United Way for Southeastern Michigan, residents want opportunities and resources to be self-reliant.

To help provide Southeast Michigan residents with pathways to success, public and private stakeholders from across the region collaborated to organize the expo.

Sponsors of the event this year included the Detroit Workforce Development Department, the Governor's Office for Southeastern Michigan, the Michigan Department of Human Services in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, the Michigan Department of Information Technology, the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (Michigan Talent Bank), Michigan Works! in Oakland and Macomb counties, the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance, and United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

In addition to connecting people with jobs, the expo linked job seekers with training and continuing education opportunities. It provided resources to overcome barriers so that people can secure and retain employment.

Employers from building and construction, contract staffing, education, finance, accounting and professional services, government, healthcare, hospitality and food service, human services, information technology, manufacturing and engineering, retail sales/service and transportation industries were all on hand to assist job seekers.

The expo made available a technology center featuring 75 computers with Internet access, printers, for job seekers to create resumés and mail them to prospective employers.

A unique component of this year's expo was the Virtual Job Fair through the Michigan Talent Bank. Approximately 100 employers participated in the fair Oct. 9-13. The combined resources of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth and the Michigan Department of Information Technology made both the technology center and job fair come about.

"The diverse pool of people looking for jobs was incredible," said Joe Cadovich, field service manager for National Time & Signal, who participated in last year's expo. "We must have received a couple hundred resumes. We were so impressed with the expo that we came back this year."

National Time & Signal is an 80-year-old company that has plants in Oak Park and Wixom. The company specializes in school clocks and life safety equipment, such as fire alarm systems.

"I believe we have a responsibility to provide Michigan jobs in order to keep and retain Michigan workers," Cadovich said.

Brenda Criteser, a trainer supervisor for the metropolitan Detroit division of Payless Shoe Source, also recruited potential employees at the expo. She had more than 25 part-time and full-time jobs available this year.

"We believe we have a great opportunity and competitive training program," Criteser said. "We're looking for people who want to grow with the company."

Detroit's Renee Fowler Raymond was a local radio announcer for 13 years, reporting traffic and weather, before her job was eliminated in 2005. She heard about the expo through a local Michigan Works! office and enjoyed talking to a lot of people.

United Way may be reached at (800) 552-1183 or the United Way 211 call center.



Muskegon Chronicle

Agencies still need items to help needy

Thursday, December 07, 2006

By Teresa Taylor Williams

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

From meals to toys, help is still available for those in need of holiday assistance.

And local agencies are depending on the public's generosity to bring Christmas cheer to area needy families.

People have been inquiring about toys for their children and asking to sign up for help providing toys and a Christmas meal for their families since October, according to Diana Stubbs, director for Mission for Area People.

"We deal with so many people who are in need for a variety of reasons," she said, adding the face of those in need ranges from "working poor" families to grandmothers raising their grandchildren.

But meals and toys are only made possible through community giving, said Carla Skoglund, executive director for the Muskegon Rescue Mission.

"The community has been wonderful to us," said Skoglund, adding that the mission was able to give more Thanksgiving baskets last month than in years past.

Most agencies ask participants to bring identification for each family member, from photo identification to insurance cards. To avoid duplication of services and to help ensure there is enough for everyone, agencies are working together and are keeping lists of client names and referrals.

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THE MACOMB DAILY NEWS

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Suspect wrote bad check while 80 cops in store

PUBLISHED: December 7, 2006

By **Chad Halcom**

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Police quickly arrested a man accused of writing a bad check this week during "Shop with a Cop" night at a Wal-Mart in Chesterfield Township.

Calvin Earl Fluckes Jr., 21, remained in Macomb County Jail on Wednesday in lieu of a \$2,000 cash bond on a charge of uttering and publishing, a 14-year felony.

Advertisement

Police say Fluckes walked into the store at 8:14 p.m. on Tuesday to cash at check for \$847.83 while more than 80 police officers were inside the premises and 40 marked police cars were parked outside.

"Not exactly thinking like a brain surgeon," said Chesterfield Lt. David Marker, who oversees some of the officers who were on the scene. "This guy's got to qualify for some kind of award."

Police said Fluckes handed the check to the cashier, who noticed the printing on the check was suspicious. She then contacted her manager, who according to reports was "able to contact police immediately" because so many were walking the store aisles.

New Baltimore Police Chief John Bolgar, who also had some members of his department present at the event, marveled at the brazen act.

"I understand there were officers at the scene who helped by standing around the suspect to form a barrier against him leaving the premises while someone from Chesterfield who had jurisdiction could actually take him into custody," Bolgar said. "Unbelievable."

Police said the incident is under investigation. Fluckes appeared for an arraignment Wednesday before 42-2 District Judge Paul Cassidy on the charge and awaits a preliminary examination date within two weeks.

Officers from around southeast Michigan take part in at least one such shopping event



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TOP HOMES

in Chesterfield each year, usually at either a participating Wal-Mart or Meijer superstore location. Families referred to the event by the state Department of Human Services have needy children accompany an assigned officer or "hero." Past events have also included participation from fire departments and EMS rescue workers.

Afterward, the children all take part in a dinner together with their families and the event planners, and the families also receive parting gift bags.



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December 7, 2006

United Way calls for statewide 211 line

National, local officials will ask governor to offer human and social service help line to all in Mich.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

National and local United Way officials plan to lobby Gov. Jennifer Granholm today to join 20 other states and help Michigan take the 211 help line statewide.

The call line, which launched operations one year ago this week, has referred 98,000 Michigan residents to more than 6,000 human and social service agencies, primarily in food, utility and housing assistance.

But it is only available to 70 percent of the state's population, who live in the state's lower half and Upper Peninsula.

The program, which runs 24 hours a day, currently operates with \$6.5 million from private foundations, corporations, nonprofit agencies and some public funds. But United Way is seeking to increase public support to help the call line operate statewide at a cost of \$10 million a year.

"It took 911 39 years to get across America," said Mike Brennan, president of United Way for Southeastern Michigan. "In a short time, it's taken 211 to get across 70 percent of Michigan. Let's get the commitment to statewide coverage of 211, so every citizen has the ability to pick up the phone and get help."

When West Bloomfield resident Carol Ann Rowland was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she didn't have health insurance but needed surgery. She tried finding help through a local hospital, the state department of human services and even called Granholm and her state senator. But no one helped her.

Then she called the 211 line, which put her in touch with a human rights lawyer who helped get her get Medicaid coverage so she could get the surgery she needed.

"Now I am better," said Rowland, 46. "They are a God-send. Without them I would have died."

Michigan currently has budgeted \$100,000 to do a demonstration project with the 211 call line, and that's a positive step, said Brian Gallagher, president of United Way of America. The next step is all Michigan residents should be able to call 211.

"This would provide a critical service to millions of people across the state," Gallagher said.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

When to call 211

Need help finding child care? How about some job assistance? Want to find an agency that provides holiday food and gifts? Or perhaps you would like to donate your time? Call 211 for referrals.

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